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ABSTRACT

A full century before Patrick Henry's persuasive battle for the rights of oppressed people, a San Juan Pueblo Indian medicine man known only as Po-Pay was the masterful communicator and agitator who orchestrated the first American revolution to drive the Spanish back into Mexico. Seeking mineral wealth, cheap labor, and the maximum number of Christian converts, the Spanish colonists immediately clashed with their Pueblo hosts in the Rio Grande Valley of northern New Mexico. As Indian-Spanish antagonisms steadily worsened, the period from 1635 to 1665 saw Po-Pay gain considerable renown and respect as a medicine man and leader in San Juan and neighboring pueblos. Po-Pay began to urge unity, establish communication networks, and whisper of armed revolt. He relied on multilingual traders, the strict adherence to Pueblo religious beliefs, and absolute secrecy to spread the word of the planned revolt. Coordinated fury broke out all across the province simultaneously on August 10, 1680, 3 days earlier than the Spanish governor's spies had predicted. Po-Pay proved himself an effective communicator, calling for attacking smaller settlements first to secure horses and weapons and as a psychological boost for the ultimate attack on Santa Fe. He also effectively controlled his followers in victory, ordering them to refrain from further acts of aggression on the long columns of Spanish refugees moving southward from Sante Fe. Many historical assessments of Po-Pay were said again, with modifications, about Patrick Henry's persuasive tactic a century later. (HTH)

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AMERICA'S EARLIEST REVOLUTIONARY VOICE

PO-PAY - - NOT PATRICK HENRY

Gordon R. Owen

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INTRODUCTION

If rhetorical critics and historians were asked to nominate this country's first great political orator, odds are most would agree with Louis Mallory, who stated, "Patrick Henry lives today in popular tradition as America's earliest and most eloquent advocate of the rights of the common man . . . one of the greatest of all political agitators." [1] Many might even go so far as another noted Henry biographer, George Willison, who dubbed the "give me liberty or give me death" orator "a forest born Demosthenes."[2]

This paper proposes that although Patrick Henry was a brilliant, influential, persuasive leader from the early stages of our fight for national independence, he was not America's earliest successful advocate of the rights of oppressed men. A full century before Henry established himself as what Mallory called "the outstanding speaker of the American Revolution,"[3] a Pueblo Indian a continent away, ignored by most historians, played as effective and remarkable a leadership and communicative role in an earlier American revolution which successfully drove out foreign oppressors.

A San Juan Pueblo Indian medicine man, known only as Po-pay, living and working in what now is northern New Mexico's Rio Grande valley, was the masterful communicator and agitator who orchestrated the first American revolution to drive Spanish colonial masters back into Mexico. Not only did the Pueblo Revolt pre-date the American Revolution of the thirteen Atlantic coastal colonies by almost exactly a century, but many of the

tributes and encomiums heaped upon the better known Henry could just as appropriately have been applied to Po-pay.

In their bible of speech criticism, Thonssen and Baird warned us over thirty years ago that determining textual accuracy is "one of the most difficult problems in rhetorical criticism."[4] If Mallory was apprehensive about the accuracy of texts of Henry's most famous speeches[5], it must immediately be conceded that any criticism of the communicative talents of a 17th century native American illiterate whose revolutionary leadership activities were limited to remote Rio Grande valley villages, must obviously be based on the sketchiest, most fragmented, difficult to document types of evidence. However, the pioneer standard setters in our field did not flatly rule out critical analysis of all historical figures for whom verifiable texts were not available. As Baird, and nearly every rhetorical critic since, have pointed out, "One important evaluation of the speech . . . must be through its immediate and later social results."[6] In the same vein, Marie Nichols reminded us that, "Orators, of course, have been agents in history and, like all agents, must be supposed to have effects."[7]

History does not provide documented evidence of the success of the social upheaval which Po-pay instigated and led, so it is on the basis of effects, of social results, that this study proposes to evaluate Po-pay the communicator and to investigate whether he may have been, in fact, a 17th century Patrick Henry.

BACKGROUND[8]

The Pueblo Indians, descendants of the Indian sub-culture which anthropologists called the Anasazi, "the old Ones", arrived in what now is the American Southwest at least 10,000 years ago. They developed to the point where, by about 1,000 years ago, elaborate road systems permitted widespread trade between a network of multi-storied apartment villages, sustained by skillfully irrigated and cultivated plots of corn, beans, and squash. Evidence of carefully developed religious practices, successful forms of self-government, and skill in architecture, trade, and even solar heating can still be viewed at sites such as Mesa Verde, Canyon de Chelly, Chaco Canyon, and Bandelier National Parks and Monumerts.

However, after population centers such as these reached peaks of development some seven centuries ago, drouth, soil depletion and erosion, resultant famine and pestilence, and raids by marauding nomadic tribes all may have contributed to the abandonment of many cliff and valley communities by 1300 A.D. The majority of these Anasazi refugees appear to have migrated to the dependable water supply and fertile soil of the Rio Grande Valley.

By 1535, four survivors of a Spanish gold-seeking expedition's disastrous shipwreck wandered into the middle reaches of the Rio Grande, exposing the Pueblo Indians for the first time to non-Indians. The tales these wanderers took to Mexico led to a full scale exploratory expedition by Coronado in 1540-42 and then to a colonizing expedition led by Onate in 1598. By

the end of the 16th century, Onate had claimed and thinly colonized the entire valley of the Rio Grande and its tributaries for the Spanish crown.

Seeking mineral wealth, cheap labor and the maximum number of Christian converts, the Spanish almost immediately clashed with their Pueblo hosts. Frustrated by the scarcity of gold, silver or any other mineral wealth, the mirage-like nature of storied bonanzas such as the Seven Cities of Cibola and Quivira, and the rigors of survival in a harsh and inhospitable desert terrain, the Spanish were both guilty of and victims of a recurring series of atrocities. The example most often and most vivdly cited by Pueblo historians was Onate's slaughter of 800 to 1,000 warriors at Acoma Pueblo and his subsequent enslavement or mutilation of the 500 survivors.

By 1615, five years before the Pilgrims landed on our east coast, a few struggling Spanish settlements and ranches were hanging on, a colonial government backed by handful of soldiers was functioning from newly established headquarters in Santa Fe, and Franciscan friars were fanning out along the Rio Grande, seeking converts and the labor needed to construct missions.

PO-PAY

Since Po-pay is, to historians, something of a mystery man, 1615 is no more than a consensus of birth date guesses for him, but it is generally agreed that the period from 1635 to 1665 not only saw Po-pay gaining considerable renown and respect as a medicine man and leader in San Juan and neighboring

pueblos north of Santa Fe, but also saw turmoil intensifying across the fledgling province. Indian-Spanish antagonisms steadily worsened and intra-Spanish rivalries between government officials, friars, and colonists seemed endless.

Central to this bickering was the question of treatment of and extraction of material and labor wealth from the Indians. Urged on by the Inquisition, church leaders became ever more diligent in their efforts to destroy what they considered to be heathenish religious objects and devil worship practices and, at the same time, to compel native participation in and support of the Catholic faith. Despite orders from Spain's king and his Council that his Indian subjects were to be protected, thousands of masks, prayer sitcks, worship aids and even kivas or temples were seized and destroyed, and land grant and labor use practices spawned an economic system which, to the Pueblos, constituted slavery. Simmons summarized the Mid-17th century plight of the Pueblos this way:

> Corrupt civil officials forced them to work without pay, contrary to law. Those same officers also stole from the Indians and abused Indian women, and any Pueblo who complained was apt to be whipped or jailed on some trumped up charge. Several of the provincial governors had operated sweatshops on the Santa Fe plaza where native people were made to weave cloth from dawn to sundown.[9]

REBELLION

By 1650, the Pueblos were sufficiently disturbed that, despite their proud heritage of never having waged offensive warfare, at least six of the villages attempted to join a group of Apaches in open revolt, only to see nine of their leaders hanged and many other enslaved.

When these conditions were exacerbated by natural misfortune, Po-pay and many other Pueblos began to suggest that it was the presence and the actions of the Spanish invaders which were upsetting nature's balance. When the years 1655 to 1668 were nearly rainless, and this led inexorably to starvation, pestilence, and intensified Apache raids, Po-pay began to urge unity, establish communication networks and whisper of armed revolt.

In 1675, Gov. Juan de Trevino determined to end the long standing feud between provincial government and the church. To demonstrate the new spirit of cooperation, Trevino proclaimed total prohibition of all native rituals and ultimately ordered the arrest of forty-seven Pueblo secret society religious leaders and medicine men. Four were ordered hanged and the rest were publicly whipped and then imprisoned. Only the threat by some seventy other village leaders to lead either an armed revolt or a mass exodus of Indians from the Rio Grande Valley induced the governor to release his religious captives.

One of those released prisoners was Po-pay, who now was convinced the die was cast and the time had come to lead his people against their oppressors. It was from this point in his

life that Po-pay's skills as a communicator and as a strategist became critical.

If he was to recruit supporters, the Pueblo leader's first problem was that of multiple languages. The sixty to seventy villages (dubbed pueblos by the Spanish) spoke as many as seven distinct languages plus many dialects. People of any village were likely to remark of residents of a neighboring pueblo, even though they shared a common language base, that they "spoke a little to one side." Po-pay's initial communicative strategem was, therefore, to depend upon multi-lingual traders, as they appeared to go about their normal nomadic routine, to spread the word that revolt plans were brewing. Concurrently, he launched his own concerted campaign of persuasion at San Juan, initially, and then througout the pueblos, assisted by those leaders of key pueblos who were won over by his rhetorical skills. Finally, Po-pay worked to overcome language barriers by utilizing universally understood non-verbal communication techniques -- painted deerskins, knotted cords, vari-colored cloths, and even smoke signals.

Besides having to bridge language gaps, Po-pay was well aware he was dealing with Pueblo traditions of strict tribal autonomy, with each village perceiving itself as separate, independent, and non-aligned. He also was sensitive to the Pueblo tradition of being peace loving and fighting only defensively, and then only after severe provocation. Po-pay knew that only an appeal to the strong religious beliefs of his followers, coupled with optimal use of his own carefully

nurtured ethical appeal could move them toward a united front. Legend had it that in their 10,000 year history, these villages never before had pooled their manpower and resources.

With each new Spanish act of repression and each new natural disaster, Po-pay spread the word both by his own persuasive skill and by his network of traders, throughout the pueblos, that here was yet further evidence of how this invader was disturbing the universe's natural order and, as a consequence, "spiritual keepers of the road of life were displeased."[10] Po-pay is also said to have reminded his followers that it appeared that very very limited assistance or relief seemed to be bestowed upon them by the invaders' vaunted new god.

Contemporary San Juan Pueblo native and historian Alfonso Ortiz reports that by this time, Po-pay had become "an extremely respected, revered religious leader."[11] He also was able to enhance his personal ethos by wrapping himself in a mantle of divine guidance, claiming to be receiving directions from the half-historical, half-legendary war god, Montezuma. These directions were channeled through personal representatives of the god, who remained permanently secluded in the underground Taos kiva which had become Po-pay's headquarters. These channels of strategic advice from the war god were variously reported to have been three underworld spirits or a yellow-eyed black giant but more important than names or identities was the fact that the Indian leader was able to invoke inspiration and motivation from spiritual forces to which most Pueblos could relate, regardless of language.

Another tactic of the master communicator was a ruthless commitment to strictest secrecy as revolt plans evolved. He was careful to confide only in those who had sworn a commitment to the cause of freedom, and in no case did this ever include a female. One historian called the revolt plans "New Mexico's best kept secret until the making of the atomic bomb."[12] When it appeared that Po-pay's own son-in-law, Nicholas Bua, was using his position as governor of San Juan to leak information to the Spanish in Santa Fe, the young governor was killed under mysterious circumstances and the fiery medicine man moved his headquarters to the more remote village of Taos. Maintenance of secrecy also explains the training given the runners, who were depended upon as links in the revolutionary communication network sometimes referred to as the "moccasin telegraph." They were drilled, in case of capture, to provide either no information or false information,or they were provided with only non-verbal deerskin or knotted yucca cord coded messages which obviated the need for them even to know sensitive informaticn.

Not only secrecy but timing was critical to the revolt's success and, again, communication skill was the key to this. The moccasin telegraph informed Po-pay that the long awaited supply train which had headed north from Mexico City toward Santa Fe, was being delayed by unusually heavy summer rains and Rio Grande runoff, meaning that August was the optimum month for culmination of Po-pay's carefully drawn plans. While there is debate as to whether Po-pay altered the uprising date when he

feared Gov. Otermin knew too much, or whether the cords by which he was communicating the critical date to all villages were intentionally so knotted as to mislead the Spanish, coordinated fury broke out all across the province simultaneously on Aug. 10, 1680, three days earlier than Gov. Otermin's spies had predicted.

Even as hostilities began, Po-pay proved himself an effective user of communication strategy. His plan called for attacking smaller settlements first, thereby securing horses and weapons, as well as a psychological boost for the ultimate attack on Santa Fe. He also arranged to send Pueblos supposedly loyal to the Spanish into Santa Fe to confide to the governor how widespread was the death and destruction at all the outlying missions and rancheros. By thus spreading false intelligence and at the same time systematically cutting all other channels of communication, the rebel leader was successful in convincing the only surviving groups of Spanish, at Santa Fe and Isleta, that all their countrymen elsewhere in the entire valley had been exterminated.

Po-pay also proved himself an effective communicator in his ability to control his followers in victory. As long columns of Spanish refugees filed southward out of Santa Fe and, later, Isleta, the Indian leader ordered his fellow Pueblos to refrain from all further acts of aggression. Acceding to his request and reverting to their natural peace loving nature, the Indians lined the ridges and quietly watched their defeated former masters straggle southward toward Mexico. The objective which Po-pay had always kept foremost in the minds of the Pueblos,

driving the oppressors completely out of the colony, had been accomplished. The loss of approximately four hundred lives on each side seemed more than an adequate price to have paid, so no further aggression was necessary.[13] For the first time in Spanish colonial history, representatives of the Crown had been forcefully and totally expelled from a Spanish province.

EVALUATION

Only a few historians, those who have specialized in the Southwest, are aware of the accomplishments of Po-pay, but it is interesting to note that many of their assessments could have been, and with modifications were in fact said about Patrick Henry a century later.

Fergusson said of Po-pay, "he proved himself a great leader, astute, far-seeing, and ruthless at need."[14] Silverberg claimed, "Rarely among the victims of the world's great empires has a leader, like Po-pay, appeared who could manage so amazingly to unite so many different and proudly independent peoples who spoke so many diverse languages."[15] Horgan called him "a leader who inspired them all. . .a whirlwind . . ."[16] Prince reported, ". . .he traveled from town to town, urging forgetfulness of old jealousies and using his wonderful eloquence to great effect."[17] Terrell believed that Po-pay "possessed extraordinary talents as a leader."[18] Finally, Page added, "One can only imagine the subtlety and power of persuasion he must have possessed to bring those independent-minded, fractious villages to the point of unity."[19]

On the other side of the coin, much of the critical acclaim accorded to the 18th century revolutionary leader Patrick Henry might have been said about 17th century Po-pay. For instance, Willison's characterization of Henry as "an eloquent and trumpeting voice leading them out of the wilderness to liberty, justice, democracy, and independence,"[20] is remarkably descriptive of Po-pay's accomplishments, also.

This author's only point of contention with the biographers of Henry is one of historical perspective. When Mallory stated that Henry was "the earliest . . . advocate of the rights of the common man,"[21] he might well have appended "with the exception of a little known 17th century Pueblo Indian medicine man." Similarly, Willison's description of Henry as "our first national hero"[22] might, in the eyes of this critic, be amended to read "second only to Po-pay."

NOTES

[1]Louis Mallory, "Patrick Henry" In A History and Criticism of American Public Address, Vol. II, William N. Brigance, ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1943), p. 559.

[2]George F. Willison, Patrick Henry and His World (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), P. vii.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, Speech Criticism (New York: Ronald Press, 1948), p. 297.

[5]Mallory, P. 590

[6]A. Craig Baird, "The Study of Speech" in Speech Criticism: Methods and Materials, William A. Linsley, ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1968), p. 51.

[7]Marie Hochmuth Nichols, "The Criticism of Rhetoric" in Speech Criticism: Methods and Materials, William A. Linsley, ed. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1968), p. 53.

[8]The review of historical background is based upon: Robert Silverberg, The Pueblos Revolt (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970); Charles W. Hackett, Revolt of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico: And Otermin's Attempted Reconquest, 1680-1682 (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1942) and Franklin Folsom, Red Power on the Rio Grande: The Native American

Revolution of 1680 (New York: Follett, 1973).

[9]Marc Simmons, "Greed, Cruelty Instigated the Pueblo Revolt," El Paso Times, July 27, 1980, p. 4-B.

[10]Don Frederick, "The Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1680," The New Mexican, Aug. 10, 1980, Section B, p. 1.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Erna Fergusson, New Mexico: Pageant of Three Peoples. (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1973), p. 177.

[13]Simmons.

[14]Ferguson.

[15]Silverberg.

[16]Paul Horgan, Great River: The Rio Grande in North American History, Vol. I (New York: Minerva Press, 1968, p. 296.

[17]L. Bradford Prince, Address delivered at dedication ceremonies, "Cross of the Martyrs." Santa Fe Plaza, Sept. 15, 1920.

[18]John U. Terrell, The Arrow and the Cross: A History of American Indian and the Missionaries (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1979), p. 85.

[19]James K. Page, Jr., "Rebellious Pueblos Outwitted Spain Three Centuries Ago," Smithsonian, October, 1980, p. 87.

[20]Willison.

[21]Mallory, p. 599.

[22]Willison. p. 8.